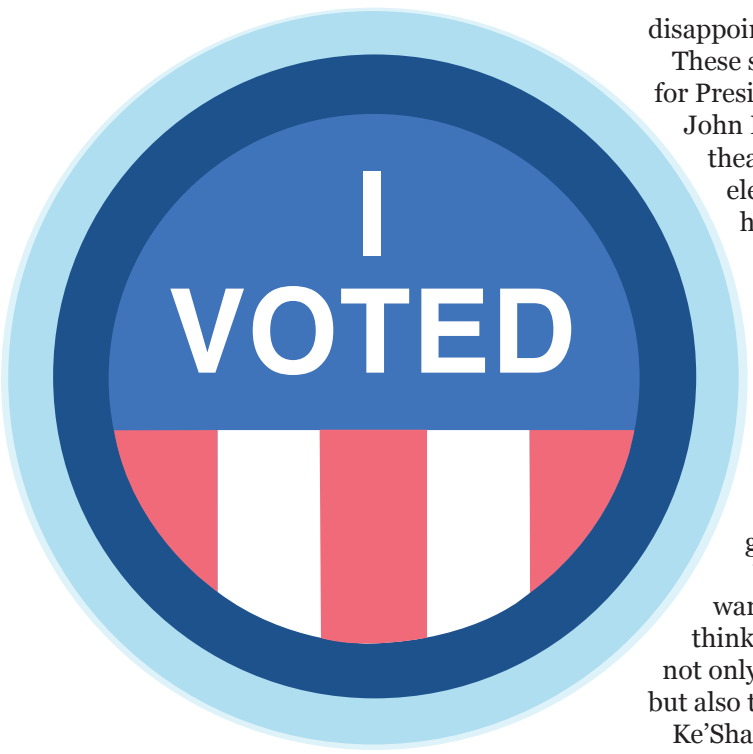
First time voices



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By age 18 rolls around, many students are worried about their studies and work and are not focused on having to make a big decision like electing the President of the United States. However, this year, students are feeling the pressure of having to vote for a new President and worry about their studies.

The consensus of most students that are getting to vote for their first presidential election was a mixture of nerves, excitement and disappointment. While the students gave a mixture of responses as to why they are ready to vote or not to vote in their first presidential election, most of the students responded as to why they are disappointed in this year's election candidates and how they as voters would rather be able to vote in a different presidential election.

Carolina Hunter, a sophomore theatre education major, said that this election is causing her to feel very nervous. "I think it's just because of who's running; it makes it a little more crazy to think about who to vote for because it's just a big impact on our country."

Isaiah Vorderstrasse, a freshman theatre performance major, agreed with Hunter and said that he feels "like the election is kind of sad this year" and just like Hunter, he is "a little disappointed in this being [his] first election."

These students expressed that the candidates for President make them want to not vote. In fact, John Lynn, a freshman musical performance theatre major, said that this Presidential election is a "disappointment because I am having to vote for the lesser of two evils."

However, other students, such as Jemma Wyke-Smith, a sophomore theatre performance major, said that she is excited to vote for the first time; but, she is not looking forward to the candidates that she has to choose between.

Lynn said that this election "basically is choosing to vote for which one is not going to destroy the country more."

With such strong opinions, students wanted to make sure that when they are thinking about who to vote for, that they are not only taking into consideration their futures, but also the future of their hopeful children.

Ke'Shawna Brown, a sophomore theatre major, said that this election year makes "it feel like I am forced to play my hand in order to save myself and my future kids from having to live in a world where we have a President like our two candidates."

In fact, Brown said that this election has made her realize that she has no "real option in anyone that I really want to be President because I do not have faith in what they are doing or going to do for our country. I'm forced to choose someone to serve our country and be our ruler and be in control of everything that stands for America."

Hunter also said that she "shouldn't have to be worried about who is going to be the President."

Yet, while these millennials are worried about choosing the correct candidate to fulfill the position as President of the United States, others are simply just ready to express their rights as Americans and let their voices be heard as voters.

Andrew Lacey, a sophomore theatre major, said that while he is excited to be able to vote, he is entirely sure about who to vote for.

"Once I figure out who I am going to vote for, I know I will be proud because I was able to do it," Lacey said.

Kayla Cook, a junior mass communication major, said "I feel like this is the best opportunity for being a first time voter just because of how the election is going so far- in particular with the choices. So, I think my vote can really make a difference and that's why I'm ready to vote."

Another junior mass communication major, Karina Young, also said that she is excited to vote in her first Presidential election. Young explained that she feels her vote will count although she is "not interested in voting because of the choices, but I know it will make a difference if I do so I'm going to vote."

Having a voice in this election seemed to be the concern of the millennials; in fact, T'Mani Eady, a junior english major, said that while she thinks it is "really cool" that she is getting the opportunity to vote for the first time, she feels that this election is one of the most important elections where "voices need to be heard."

Jessica Della Rocca, sophomore elementary education major, said that she is also prepared to let her "voice be heard" as she votes in this election. Yet, these "voices" that are going to be making an impact in this election, are the voices that get to express first hand who they would like to be their President instead of just sitting back and watching as others vote a candidate into Presidency.

Bridget Baker, a senior early childhood education major, "I'm excited to vote this year because I can finally have a say in who is our President. As an early childhood major, this is a big impact on what goes on in schools."

One of the soon to be voters expressed his main concern with voting and that it is not the candidates, but the fact that many Americans are not going to take advantage of their right to vote simply because they do not agree with the candidates.

Michael Williams, a sophomore theatre performance major, explained that "I feel honored that I get the opportunity to vote. I believe that everybody should take advantage of this opportunity to vote because it is a great honor that many Americans died and have fought for. I'm really going to take into consideration who I am voting for and cherish this moment."

Baker also stated that although she feels like this election is disappointing, she finds it the idea of students choosing not to vote in this election to be the most disturbing part. "A lot of people our age don't really understand that if you don't vote, then your voice isn't being heard," Baker said.

As a whole, millennials have proven that they are wanting to vote. However, they wish to do so under different circumstances. After much consideration, many of the students have decided to vote and use their rights as Americans to put a President into power than will essentially lead this country into a great new era and will do so by putting forth their best effort.

Important and unheard: the black women's vote

Ryan Brooks
Special to The Johnsonian

Black women are a force to be reckoned with when it comes to voting and presidential elections.

According to data from The Washington Post and AFL-CIO, in 2008 and 2012, Black women voted at a higher rate than any other group of people. In 2012, 74 percent of eligible Black women voted in the presidential election and 96 percent of those women voted for President Obama; delivering key swing states like Ohio, Pennsylvania and Florida for the campaign.

This should be of no surprise to political pundits. According to a recent report released by AFL-CIO, Black women are one of the most progressive political voting blocs and have also been one of the most reliable voting blocs for Democrats with their large turnouts in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections.

But some Black women feel like the votes they cast for the Democratic party have been taken for granted and that the issues they care about haven't been represented by either major party candidate. Winthrop students, Ashley Briggs and Me'Chelle McIntyre, are among those women.

Briggs said she feels that once elected officials are sworn into political office with the help of the Black vote, they don't cash in on the previous promises they made to Black voters on the campaign trail.

"America has written Black people, in a sense, a check that has yet to be cashed; and if you looked at it that way, the Democratic Party has written the same check for Black women," said Briggs. "They get in and say these things like, 'we're going to do this for the Black community, we're going to do that,' but when it's time for them to get into office we don't see the fruits of their labor."

According to a study conducted by Black Women's Roundtable, top political priorities for Black women include affordable health-care, criminal justice reform and college affordability, with criminal justice reform and college affordability sharing the number two spot.

For millennial Black women, criminal justice reform is the number one priority for 96 percent of the group and criminal justice reform rose 16 percent for Black women overall between 2015 and 2016.

The shift in criminal justice reform becoming a top priority for Black women is likely due to the current civil rights and social justice movements taking the country by storm. They are pushing to organize communities and to call for reform in both the criminal justice system and policing. These movements have frequently seen Black women on the front-lines organizing direct action campaigns, but their interests have often been left out of conversations concerning police brutality and social justice held by the public and various politicians.

Briggs and McIntyer said they both want to see the Democratic presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton, and the Democratic Party take a firmer and more inclusive stance on supporting criminal justice reform.

"With me being a Black woman, that's another thing that I look at — the social injustices that are happening. [The candidates] are just now opening their eyes up and looking into it. [Clinton's] just now starting to represent and say their names—but we had to push you to say their names," McIntyer said.

Briggs pushed even further, encouraging candidates to also speak about the Black women who have been killed by police or in police-custody.

"Even when the Democratic Party is addressing the number of Black people who have been affected by police brutality, Black women who have fallen victim to police brutality — they're not saying their names, we always hear about Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner — but what about the women? What about Sandra Bland and Rekia Boyd?" said Briggs.

Despite Clinton speaking about implicit bias while answering a question on policing during one of the presidential debates and sharing the democratic convention stage with 'mothers of the movement' this past July, she is still under scrutiny from many for comments she made in 1996, calling African-Americans 'super-predators,' and for the role her husband, President Bill Clinton, played in increasing mass incarceration that disproportionately affected Black communities, through policies he advocated for.

"Right now she has Black people saying 'oh, she cares about us.' Well, are you out there rallying with us? Are you out there speaking? What are you doing to help us? Are you passing laws? Have you passed laws that helped us or hurt us?" McIntyer said.

Although there is a sense of ambivalence towards the Clinton campaign and the current presidential election in general, YouGov's election model predicts that 90 percent of Black women who vote, will do so in support of Clinton on Nov. 8.

Black women realize the political power that they hold as voters and there are many non-partisan campaigns encouraging Black women to vote, like the #BlackWomenVote campaign, which was created by the Higher Heights foundation.

The campaign aims to help Black women prepare to vote and get out the vote in their social networks. Glynda C. Carr, cofounder of Higher Heights, said she realizes the influence Black women have, not only in elections, but in their communities as political organizers.

"We know that when you fire up a Black woman, she does not go to the polls alone, she brings her house, her block, her church, her sorority, and her water cooler," Carr said.

Janay Reece / The Johnsonian

Women of color participating and leading various protests on campus related to police violence and brutality.

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